

OF  
ORATORY:

A  
DIALOGUE.



A  
D I A L O G U E  
C O N C E R N I N G  
The R I S E and D E C L I N E  
O F  
E L O Q U E N C E  
A M O N G T H E R O M A N S .

T R A N S L A T E D F R O M T H E L A T I N ,

B Y

W I L L I A M M E L M O U T H , E s q ;

*The translator of Pliny*

L O N D O N :

P r i n t e d i n t h e Y E A R , M D C C L V I I .



## E X T R A C T

From the seventy-fifth letter of

Sir THOMAS FITZOSBORNE, Bart.

— UPON this principle, I imagine, it is, that some of the finest pieces of antiquity are written in the dialogue-manner. Plato and Tully, it should seem, thought truth could never be examined with more advantage, than amidst the amicable opposition of well-regulated converse. It is probable, indeed, that subjects of a serious and philosophical kind were more frequently the topics of Greek and Roman conversations, than they are of ours ; as the circumstances of the world had not yet given occasion to those prudential reasons which may now, perhaps, restrain a more free exchange of sentiments amongst us. There was something, likewise, in the very scenes themselves where they usually assembled, that almost unavoidably turned the

stream of their conversations into this useful channel. Their rooms and gardens were generally adorned, you know, with the statues of the greatest masters of reason that had then appeared in the world; and while Socrates or Aristotle stood in their view, it is no wonder their discourse fell upon those subjects, which such animating representations would naturally suggest. It is probable, therefore, that many of those antient pieces, which are drawn up in the dialogue manner, were no imaginary conversations invented by their authors; but faithful transcripts from real life. And it is this circumstance, perhaps, as much as any other, which contributes to give them that remarkable advantage over the generality of modern compositions, which have been formed upon the same plan. I am sure, at least, I could scarce name more than three or four of this kind which have appeared in our language, worthy of notice. My lord Shaftesbury's dialogue, entitled, *The moralists*; Mr. Addison's upon antient Coins; Mr. Spence's upon the *Odyssæy*, together with those of my very ingenious friend Philemon to Hydaspees; are, almost, the only

productions in this way, which have hitherto come forth among us with advantage. These, indeed, are all master-pieces of the kind, and written in the true spirit of learning and politeness. The conversation in each of these most elegant performances is conducted, not in the usual absurd method of introducing one disputant to be tamely silenced by the other ; but in the more lively dramatic manner, where a just contraste of characters is preserved throughout, and where the several speakers support their respective sentiments with all the strength and spirit of a well-bred opposition.

BUT of all the conversation-pieces, whether antient or modern, either of the moral or polite kind, I know not one which is more elegantly written, than the little anonymous *DIALOGUE* concerning the rise and decline of eloquence among the Romans. I call it anonymous, though I am sensible it has been ascribed, not only to Tacitus and Quintilian, but even to Suetonius. The reasons, however, which the critics have respectively produced are so exceedingly precarious and inconclusive, that one must have a ve-

ry extraordinary share of classical faith indeed, to receive it as the performance of any of those celebrated writers. It is evidently, however, a composition of that period in which they flourished; and, if I were disposed to indulge a conjecture, I should be inclined to give it to the younger Pliny. It exactly coincides with his age; it is addressed to one of his particular friends and correspondents; it is marked with some similar expressions and sentiments. But, as arguments of this kind are always more imposing than solid, I recommend it to you as a piece, concerning the author of which, nothing satisfactory can be collected. This I may one day or other, perhaps, attempt to prove in form, as I have amused myself with giving it an English dress. In the mean time I have enclosed my translation in this packet; not only with a view to your sentiments, but in return to your favour. I was persuaded I could not make you a better acknowledgement for the pleasure of that conversation which I lately participated through your means, than by introducing you to one, which (if my copy is not extremely injurious to its original) I am sure you cannot attend to, without equal entertainment and advantage. Adieu. I am, etc.

A  
D I A L O G U E  
C O N C E R N I N G  
O R A T O R Y.  
A D D R E S S E D T O  
F A B I U S.

*It is necessary to inform those readers of the following DIALOGUE, who may be disposed to compare it with the original, that the edition of Heumannus, printed at Gottingen, 1719, has been generally followed.*

## DIALOGUE, ETC.

**Y**OU have frequently, my friend, required me to assign a reason whence it has happened, that the oratorical character, which spread such a glorious lustre upon former ages, is now so totally extinct amongst us, as scarce to preserve even its name. It is the antients alone, you observed, whom we distinguish with that appellation; while the eloquent of the present times are styl'd only pleaders, patrons, advo-

10 OF ORATORY:

cates, or any thing, in short, but orators.

HARDLY, I believe, should I have attempted a solution of your difficulty, or ventured upon the examination of a question, wherein the genius of the moderns, if they cannot, or their judgment, if they will, not rise to the same heights, must necessarily be given up; had I nothing of greater authority to offer upon the subject, than my own particular sentiments. But having been present, in the very early part of my life, at a conversation between some persons of great eloquence, considering the age in which they lived, who dis-

## A DIALOGUE. II

cussed this very point ; my memory, and not my judgment, will be concerned, whilst I endeavour, in their own stile and manner, and according to the regular course of their debate, to lay before you the several reasonings of those celebrated geniuses. Each of them, indeed, agreeably to the peculiar turn and character of the speaker, alleging different, though probable, causes of the same fact ; but all of them supporting their respective sentiments with ingenuity and good sense. Nor were the orators of the present age without an advocate in this debate : for one of the company took the opposite side, and treating the antients with much

12 OF ORATORY:

severity and contempt, declared in favour of modern eloquence.

MARCUS APER and Julius Secundus, two distinguished geniuses of our forum, made a visit to Maternus the day after he had publicly recited his tragedy of Cato : a piece, which gave, it seems, great offence to those in power, and was much canvassed in all conversations. Maternus, indeed, seemed throughout that whole performance, to have considered only what was suitable to the character of his hero, without paying a proper regard to those prudential restraints, which were necessary for his own security. I was at that time a warm admirer

## A DIALOGUE. 13

and constant follower of those great men; insomuch, that I not only attended them when they were engaged in the courts of judicature; but, from my fond attachment to the arts of eloquence, and with a certain ardency peculiar to youth, I joined in all their parties, and was present at their most private conversations. Their great abilities, however, could not secure them from the critics. They alleged, that Secundus had by no means an easy elocution; whilst Aper, they pretended, owed his reputation as an orator, more to nature than to art. It is certain, nevertheless, that their objections were without foundation. The speech-

#### 14. OF ORATORY:

es of the former were always delivered with sufficient fluency; and his expression was clear, though concise: as the latter had, most undoubtedly, a general tincture of literature. The truth is, one could not so properly say, he was *without*, as *above* the assistance of learning. He imagined, perhaps, the powers and application of his genius would be so much the more admired, as it should not appear to derive any of its lustre from the acquired arts.

WE found Maternus, when we entered his apartment, with the tragedy in his hand which he had recited the day before. Are you

## A DIALOGUE. 15

then (said Secundus, addressing himself to him) so little discouraged with the malicious insinuations of these ill-natured censurers, as still to cherish this obnoxious tragedy of yours? Or, perhaps, you are revising it, in order to expunge the exceptionable passages; and purpose to send your Cato into the world, I will not say with superior charms, but, at least, with greater security than in its original form. You may peruse it (returned he) if you please; you will find it remains just in the same situation as when you heard it read. I intend, however, that Thyestes shall supply the defects of Cato: for I am meditating a tragedy upon

## 16 OF ORATORY:

that subject, and have already, indeed, formed the plan. I am hastening, therefore, the publication of this play in my hand, that I may apply myself entirely to my new design. Are you then, in good earnest (replied Aper) so enamoured of dramatic poetry, as to renounce the business of oratory in order to consecrate your whole leisure to ——— Medea I think it was before, and now, it seems, to Thyestes? When the causes of so many worthy friends, the interests of so many powerful communities, demand you in the forum: a task more than sufficient to employ your attention, though neither Cato nor

## A DIALOGUE. 17

Domitius had any share of it; though you were not continually turning from one dramatic performance to another, and adding the tales of Greece to the history of Rome.

I SHOULD be concerned, answered Maternus, at the severity of your rebuke, if the frequency of our debates upon this subject, had not rendered it somewhat familiar to me. But how (added he, smiling) can you accuse me of deserting the business of my profession, when I am every day engaged in *defending* poetry against your accusations? And I am glad (continued he, looking towards Secun-

18 OF ORATORY:

us) that we have now an opportunity of discussing this point before so competent a judge. His decision will either determine me to renounce all pretensions to poetry for the future, or (which I rather hope) will be a sanction for my quitting that confined species of oratory, in which, methinks, I have sufficiently laboured, and authorize the devoting myself to the more enlarged and sacred eloquence of the muses.

GIVE me leave, interposed Secundus, before Aper takes exception to his judge, to say, what all honest ones usually do in the same circumstances, that I desire to be

A DIALOGUE. 19

excused from sitting in judgment upon a cause, wherein I must acknowledge myself biased in favour of a party concerned: all the world is sensible of that strict friendship which has long subsisted between me and that excellent man, as well as great poet, Saleius Bassus. To which let me add, if the Muses are to be arraigned, I know of none who can offer more prevailing bribes.

I HAVE nothing to allege against Bassus (returned Aper) or any other man, who, not having talents for the bar, chooses to establish a reputation of the poetical kind. Nor shall I suffer Maternus (for I

20 OF ORATORY:

am willing to join issue with him before you) to evade my charge, by drawing others into his party. My accusation is levelled singly against him ; who, formed as he is by nature with a most masculine and truly oratorical genius, chooses to suffer so noble a faculty to lie waste and uncultivated. I must remind him, however, that by the exercise of this commanding talent, he might at once both acquire and support the most important friendships, and have the glory to see whole provinces and nations rank themselves under his patronage : a talent, of all others, the most advantageous, whether considered with respect to interest, or to

## A DIALOGUE. 21

honours ; a talent, in short, that affords the most illustrious means of propagating a reputation, not only within our own walls, but throughout the whole compass of the Roman empire, and indeed to the most distant nations of the globe.

IF utility ought to be the governing motive of every action and every design of our lives ; can we possibly be employed to better purpose, than in the exercise of an art, which enables a man, upon all occasions, to support the interest of his friend, to protect the rights of the stranger, to defend the cause of the injured ? that not

22 OF ORATORY:

only renders him the terror of his open and secret adversaries, but secures him, as it were, by the most firm and permanent guard?

THE particular usefulness, indeed, of this profession, is evidently manifested in the opportunities it supplies of serving others, though we should have no occasion to exert it in our own behalf: but should we, upon any occurrence, be ourselves attacked, the sword and buckler is not a more powerful defence in the day of battle, than oratory in the dangerous season of public arraignment. What had Marcellus lately to oppose to the united resentment of the whole se-

## A DIALOGUE. 23

nate, but his eloquence? Yet, supported by that formidable auxiliary, he stood firm and unmoved, amidst all the assaults of the artful Helvidius; who, notwithstanding he was a man of sense and elocution, was totally inexpert in the management of this sort of contests. But I need not insist farther on this head; well persuaded as I am, that Maternus will not controvert so clear a truth. Rather let me observe the pleasure which attends the exercise of the persuasive arts: a pleasure, which does not arise only once, perhaps, in a whole life; but flows in a perpetual series of gratifications. What can be more agreeable to a liberal and ingenuous

## 24 OF ORATORY:

mind, formed with a relish of rational enjoyments, than to see one's levee crouded with a concourse of the most illustrious personages? not as followers of your interest, or your power; not because you are rich and destitute of heirs; but singly in consideration of your superior qualifications. It is not unusual upon these occasions, to observe the wealthy, the powerful, and the childless, addressing themselves to a young man (and probably no rich one) in favour of themselves or their friends. Tell me now, has authority or wealth a charm, equal to the satisfaction of thus beholding persons of the highest dignity, venerable by their

## A DIALOGUE. 25

age, or powerful by their credit, in the full enjoyment of every external advantage, courting your assistance, and tacitly acknowledging, that, great and distinguished as they are, there is something still wanting to them more valuable than all their possessions? Represent to yourself the honourable croud of clients conducting the orator from his house, and attending him in his return: think of the glorious appearance he makes in public, the distinguishing respect that is paid to him in the courts of judicature, the exultation of heart when he rises up before a full audience, hushed in solemn silence and fixed attention,

## 26 OF ORATORY:

pressing round the admired speaker, and receiving every passion he deems proper to raise ! Yet these are but the ordinary joys of eloquence, and visible to every common observer. There are others, and those far superior, of a more concealed and delicate kind, and of which the orator himself can alone be sensible. Does he stand forth prepared with a studied harangue ? As the composition, so the pleasure in this instance, is more solid and equal. If, on the other hand, he rises in a new and unexpected debate, the previous solicitude which he feels upon such occasions, recommends and improves the pleasure of his success ; as indeed

## A DIALOGUE. 27

the most exquisite satisfaction of this kind is, when he boldly hazards the unpremeditated speech. For it is in the productions of genius, as in the fruits of the earth; those which arise spontaneously, are ever the most agreeable. If I may venture to mention myself, I must acknowledge, that neither the satisfaction I received when I was first invested with the laticlave, nor even when I entered upon the several high posts in the state; though the pleasure was heightened to me, not only as those honours were new to my family, but as I was born in a city by no means favourable to my pretensions: — the warm transports, I say, which I felt at

D

28 OF ORATORY:

those times, were far inferior to the joy which has glowed in my breast, when I have successfully exerted my humble talents in defence of those causes and clients committed to my care. To say truth, I imagined myself, at such seasons, to be raised above the highest dignities, and in the possession of something far more valuable, than either the favour of the great, or the bounty of the wealthy can ever bestow.

OF all the arts or sciences, there is not one, which crowns its votaries with a reputation in any degree comparable to that of eloquence. It is not only those of a

## A DIALOGUE. 29

more exalted rank in the state, who are witnesses of the orator's fame ; it is extended to the observation even of our very youth, of any hopes or merit. Whose example, for instance, do parents more frequently recommend to their sons ? Or who are more the gaze and admiration of the people in general ? Whilst every stranger that arrives, is curious of seeing the man, of whose character he has heard such honourable report. I will venture to affirm, that Marcellus, whom I just now mentioned, and Vibius (for I choose to produce my instances from modern times, rather than from those more remote) are as well known in the most distant

### 30 OF ORATORY:

corners of the empire, as they are at Capua or Vercellæ, the places, it is said, of their respective nativity: an honour, for which they are by no means indebted to their immense riches. On the contrary, their wealth may justly, it should seem, be ascribed to their eloquence. Every age, indeed, can produce persons of genius, who, by means of this powerful talent, have raised themselves to the most exalted station. But the instances I just now mentioned, are not drawn from distant times: they fall within the observation of our own eyes. Now the more obscure the original extraction of those illustrious persons was, the more humble the patri-

## A DIALOGUE. 31

mony to which they were born ; so much stronger proof they afford of the great advantage of the oratorical arts. Accordingly, without the recommendation of family or fortune ; without any thing very extraordinary in their virtues (and one of them rather contemptible in his address) they have, for many years, maintained the highest credit and authority among their fellow citizens. Thus, from being chiefs in the forum, where they preserved their distinguished eminence as long as they thought proper ; they have passed on to the enjoyment of the same high rank in Vespasian's favour, whose esteem for them seems to be mixed even

## 32 OF ORATORY:

with a degree of reverence: as indeed they both support and conduct the whole weight of his administration. That excellent and venerable prince (whose singular character it is, that he can endure to hear truth) well knows that the rest of his favourites are distinguished only as they are the objects of his munificence; the supplies of which he can easily raise, and with the same facility confer on others. Whereas Crispus and Marcellus recommended themselves to his notice, by advantages which no earthly potentate either did, or could, bestow. The truth of it is, inscriptions, and statues, and ensigns of dignity could claim but the low-

## A DIALOGUE. 33

est rank, amidst their more illustrious distinctions. Not that they are unpossessed of honours of this kind, any more than they are destitute of wealth or power: advantages, much oftener affectedly depreciated, than sincerely despised.

SUCH, my friends, are the ornaments and such the rewards of an early application to the business of the forum, and the arts of oratory! But poetry, to which Martenus wishes to devote his days (for it was that which gave rise to our debate) confers neither dignity to her followers in particular, nor advantage to society in general. The whole amount of her preten-

# 34 OF ORATORY:

sions is nothing more than the transient pleasure of a vain and fruitless applause. Perhaps what I have already said, and am going to add, may not be very agreeable to my friend Maternus: however, I will venture to ask him, what avails the eloquence of his Jason or Agamemnon? What mortal does it either defend or oblige? Who is it that courts the patronage, or joins the train, of Bassus, that ingenious (or if you think the term more honourable) that illustrious poet? Eminent as he may be, if his friend, his relation, or himself was involved in any litigated transactions, he would be under the necessity of having recourse to Secun-

## A DIALOGUE. 35

dus, or perhaps to you, my friend \*. But by no means, however, as you are a poet, and in order to solicit you to bestow some verses upon him: for verses he can compose himself, fair, it seems, and goodly. — Yet after all, when he has, at the cost of much time, and many a laboured lucubration, spun out a single canto, he is obliged to traverse the whole town in order to collect an audience. Nor can he procure even this compliment, slight as it is, without actually purchasing it: for the hiring a room, erecting a stage, and dispersing his tickets, are articles which must necessarily be attended with some ex-

\* Maternus.

## 36 OF ORATORY:

pence. And let us suppose that his poem is approved: the whole admiration is over in a day or two, like that of a fine flower which dies away without producing any fruit. In a word, it secures to him, neither friend nor patron, nor confers even the most inconsiderable favour upon any single creature. The whole amount of his humble gains, is the fleeting pleasure of a clamorous applause! We looked upon it, lately, as an uncommon instance of generosity in Vespasian, that he presented Bassus with fifty thousand sesterces †. Honourable, I grant, it is, to possess a genius which merits the im-

† About 400 l. of our money.

A DIALOGUE. 37

perial bounty: but how much more glorious (if a man's circumstances will admit of it) to exhibit in one's own person an example of munificence and liberality? Let it be remembered likewise, that if you would succeed in your poetical labours, and produce any thing of real worth in that art, you must retire, as the poets express themselves,

*To silent grottoes and sequester'd groves.*

That is, you must renounce the conversation of your friends, and every civil duty of life, to be concealed in gloomy and unprofitable solitude.

If we consider the votaries of this

### 38 OF ORATORY:

idle art with respect to fame, that single recompence which they pretend to derive, or indeed to seek, from their studies; we shall find, they do not by any means enjoy an equal proportion of it with the sons of oratory. For even the best poets fall within the notice of but a very small proportion of mankind; whilst indifferent ones are universally disregarded. Tell me, Maternus, did ever the reputation of the most approved rehearsal of the poetical kind, reach the cognizance even of half the town; much less extend itself to distant provinces? Did ever any foreigner, upon his arrival here, enquire after Bassus? Or if he did, it was merely as he would

## A DIALOGUE. 39

after a picture or a statue ; just to look upon him and pass on. I would in no sort be understood as discouraging the pursuit of poetry in those who have no talents for oratory ; if happily they can, by that means, amuse their leisure and establish a just character. I look upon every species of eloquence as venerable and sacred ; and prefer her, in whatever guise she may think proper to appear, before any other of her sister-arts : not only, Maternus, when she exhibits herself in your chosen favourite, the solemn tragedy, or lofty heroic, but even in the pleasant lyric, the wanton elegy, the severe iambic, the witty epigram, or, in one word, in

## 40 OF ORATORY:

whatever other habit she is pleased to assume. But (I repeat it again) my complaint is levelled singly against you ; who, designed as you are by nature for the most exalted rank of eloquence, choose to desert your station, and deviate into a lower order. Had you been endued with the athletic vigour of Nicostatus, and born in Greece, where arts of that sort are esteemed not unworthy of the most refined characters; as I could not patiently have suffered that uncommon strength of arm, formed for the noble combat, to have idly spent itself in throwing the javelin, or tossing the coit : so I now call you forth from rehearsals and the-

## A DIALOGUE. 41

atres, to the forum, and business, and high debate; especially since you cannot urge the same plea for engaging in poetry which is now generally alleged, that it is less liable to give offence than oratory. For the ardency of your genius has already flamed forth, and you have incurred the displeasure of our superiors: not, indeed, for the sake of a friend; that would have been far less dangerous; but in support, truly, of Cato! Nor can you offer in excuse, either the duty of your profession, justice to your client, or the unguarded heat of debate. You fixed, it should seem, upon this illustrious and popular subject with deliberate design, and as a charac-

## 42 OF ORATORY:

ter that would give weight and authority to your sentiments. You will reply (I am aware) "it was  
 " that very circumstance which  
 " gained you such universal ap-  
 " plause, and rendered you the  
 " general topic of discourse." Talk no more then, I beseech you, of security and repose, whilst you thus industriously raise up to yourself so potent an adversary. For my own part, at least, I am contented with engaging in questions of a more modern and private nature; wherein, if in defence of a friend I am under a necessity of taking liberties unacceptable, perhaps, to my superiors, the honest freedom of my zeal will, I trust,

## A DIALOGUE. 43

not only be excused but applauded.

APER having delivered this with his usual warmth and earnestness; I am prepared (replied Maternus, in a milder tone and with an air of pleasantry) to draw up a charge against the orators, no less copious than that of my friend's panegyric in their behalf. I suspected, indeed, he would turn out of his road, in order to attack the poets; though I must own, at the same time, he has somewhat softened the severity of his satire, by certain concessions he is pleased to make in their favour. He is willing, I perceive, to allow those, whose genius does

F

## 44 OF ORATORY:

not point to oratory, to apply themselves to poetry. Nevertheless, I do not scruple to acknowledge, that with some talents, perhaps, for the forum, I chose to build my reputation on dramatic poetry. The first attempt I made for this purpose, was by exposing the dangerous power of Vatinius : a power which even Nero himself disapproved, and which that infamous favourite abused, to the profanation of the sacred muses. And I am persuaded, if I enjoy any share of fame, it is to poetry rather than to oratory that I am indebted for the acquisition. It is my fixed purpose, therefore, entirely to withdraw myself from the fatigue of the

bar  
of  
ents  
in f  
than  
nou  
I m  
thei  
stan  
trary  
a fun  
I an  
I sha  
my l  
haps

W  
tude  
tive,

## A DIALOGUE. 45

bar. I am by no means ambitious of that splendid concourse of clients, which Aper has represented in such pompous colours, any more than I am of those sculptured honours which he mentioned; though I must confess, they have made their way into my family, notwithstanding my inclinations to the contrary. Innocence is, now at least, a surer guard than eloquence; and I am in no apprehension, that I shall ever have occasion to open my lips in the senate, unless, perhaps, in defence of a friend.

Woods, and groves, and solitude, the objects of Aper's invective, afford me, I will own to him,

## 46 OF ORATORY:

the most exquisite satisfaction. Accordingly, I esteem it one of the great privileges of poetry, that it is not carried on in the noise and tumult of the world, amidst the painful importunity of anxious suitors, and the affecting tears of distressed criminals. On the contrary, a mind enamoured of the muses, retires into scenes of innocence and repose, and enjoys the sacred haunts of silence and contemplation. Here genuine eloquence received her birth, and *here* she fixed her sacred and sequestered habitation. It was *here*, in decent and becoming garb, she recommended herself to the early notice of mortals, inspiring the breasts of the

## A DIALOGUE. 47

blameless and the good: *here* first the voice divine of oracles was heard. But *she* of modern growth, offspring of lucre and contention, was born in evil days, and employed (as *Aper* very justly expressed it) instead of a *weapon*: whilst happier times, or, in the language of the muses, the golden age, free alike from orators and from crimes, abound with inspired poets, who exerted their noble talents, not in defending the guilty, but in celebrating the good. Accordingly no character was ever more eminently distinguished or more augustly honoured: first by the gods themselves, to whom the poets were supposed to serve as ministers

## 48 OF ORATORY:

at their feasts, and messengers of their high behests; and afterwards by that sacred offspring of the gods, the first venerable race of legislators. In that glorious list we read the names, not of orators indeed, but of Orpheus, and Linus, or, if we are inclined to trace the illustrious roll still higher, even of Apollo himself.

BUT these, perhaps, will be treated by Ape<sup>r</sup> as heroes of Romance. He cannot however deny, that Homer has received as signal honours from posterity, as Demosthenes; or that the fame of Sophocles or Euripides is as extensive, as that of Lycias or Hyper-

## A DIALOGUE. 49

des ; that Cicero's merit is less universally confessed than Virgil's ; or that not one of the compositions of Asinius or Messala is in so much request, as the Medea of Ovid, or the Thyestes of Varius. I will advance even farther, and venture to compare the unenvied fortune and happy self-converse of the poet, with the anxious and busy life of the orator ; notwithstanding the hazardous contentions of the latter may possibly raise him even to the consular dignity. Far more desirable, in my estimation, was the calm retreat of Virgil : where yet he lived not unhonoured by his prince, nor unregarded by the world. If the truth of either of these assertions

50 OF ORATORY:

should be questioned, the letters of Augustus will witness the former; as the latter is evident from the conduct of the whole Roman people, who when some verses of that divine poet were repeated in the theatre, where he happened to be present, rose up to a man and saluted him with the same respect that they would have paid to Augustus himself. But to mention our own times: I would ask whether Secundus Pomponius is any thing inferior either in dignity of life, or solidity of reputation, to Afer Domitius? As to Crispus or Marcellus, to whom Aper refers me for an animating example, what is there in their present exalted for-

## A DIALOGUE. 51

tunes really defireable? Is it that they pass their whole lives either in being alarmed for themselves, or in striking terror into others? Is it that they are daily under a necessity of courting the very men they hate? that holding their dignities by unmanly adulation, their masters never think them sufficiently slaves, nor the people sufficiently free? And after all, what is this their so much envied power? Nothing more, in truth, than what many a paltry freed-man has frequently enjoyed. But — “ ME  
 “ let the lovely muses lead (as Virgil sings) to silent groves and heavenly-haunted streams, remote  
 “ from business and from care;

G

52 OF ORATORY:

“ and still superior to the painful  
 “ necessity of acting in wretched  
 “ opposition to my better heart.  
 “ Nor let me more, with anxious  
 “ steps and dangerous, pursue pale  
 “ fame amidst the noisy forum!  
 “ May never clamorous suitors,  
 “ nor panting freed-men, with of-  
 “ ficious haste, awake my peaceful  
 “ slumbers! Uncertain of futuri-  
 “ ty, and equally unconcerned, ne-  
 “ ver may I bribe the favour of the  
 “ great, by rich bequests to avarice  
 “ insatiate; nor, accumulation vain!  
 “ amass more wealth than I may  
 “ transfer as inclination prompts,  
 “ whenever shall arrive my life’s  
 “ last fatal period: and then, not  
 “ in horrid guise of mournful pomp,

A DIALOGUE. 53

“ but crowned with chaplets gay,  
“ may I be entombed ; nor let a  
“ friend, with unavailing zeal, fol-  
“ licit the useless tribute of post-  
“ humous memorials !”

MATERNUS had scarce finished these words, which he uttered with great emotion, and with an air of inspiration, when Messalla entered the room ; who, observing much attention in our countenances, and imagining the conversation turned upon something of more than ordinary import ; Perhaps, said he, you are engaged in a *consultation*, and I doubt I am guilty of an unseasonable interruption. By no means, answered Secundus ; on the

54 OF ORATORY:

contrary, I wish you had given us your company sooner; for, I am persuaded you would have been extremely entertained. Our friend Aper has, with great eloquence, been exhorting Maternus, to turn the whole strength of his genius and his studies to the business of the forum: while Maternus, on the other hand, agreeably to the character of one who was pleading the cause of the muses, has defended his favourite art with a boldness and elevation of style more suitable to a poet than an orator.

IT would have afforded me infinite pleasure, replied Messalla, to have been present at a debate of

A DIALOGUE. 55

this kind. And I cannot but express my satisfaction, in finding the most eminent orators of our times, not confining their geniuses to points relating to their profession; but canvassing such other topics in their conversation, as give a very advantageous exercise to their faculties, at the same time that it furnishes an entertainment, of the most instructive kind, not only to themselves, but to those who have the privilege of being joined in their party. And believe me, Secundus, the world received with much approbation your history of Julius Asiaticus, as an earnest that you intend to publish more pieces of the same nature. On the other side (continued

56 OF ORATORY:

he, with an air of irony) it is observed, with equal satisfaction, that Aper has not yet bid adieu to the questions of the schools, but employs his leisure rather after the example of the modern rhetoricians, than of the ancient orators.

54 OF ORATORY:

contrary, I wish you had given us your company sooner; for, I am persuaded you would have been extremely entertained. Our friend Aper has, with great eloquence, been exhorting Maternus, to turn the whole strength of his genius and his studies to the business of the forum: while Maternus, on the other hand, agreeably to the character of one who was pleading the cause of the muses, has defended his favourite art with a boldness and elevation of style more suitable to a poet than an orator.

IT would have afforded me infinite pleasure, replied Messalla, to have been present at a debate of

## A DIALOGUE. 55

this kind. And I cannot but express my satisfaction, in finding the most eminent orators of our times, not confining their geniuses to points relating to their profession; but canvassing such other topics in their conversation, as give a very advantageous exercise to their faculties, at the same time that it furnishes an entertainment, of the most instructive kind, not only to themselves, but to those who have the privilege of being joined in their party. And believe me, Secundus, the world received with much approbation your history of Julius Asiaticus, as an earnest that you intend to publish more pieces of the same nature. On the other side (continued

56 OF ORATORY:

he, with an air of irony) it is observed, with equal satisfaction, that Aper has not yet bid adieu to the questions of the schools, but employs his leisure rather after the example of the modern rhetoricians, than of the ancient orators.

I PERCEIVE, returned Aper, that you continue to treat the moderns with your usual derision and contempt; while the antients alone are in full possession of your esteem. It is a maxim, indeed, I have frequently heard you advance (and, allow me to say, with much injustice to yourself and to your brother) that there is no such thing in the present age as an orator.

## A DIALOGUE. 57

This you are the less scrupulous to maintain, as you imagine it cannot be imputed to a spirit of envy; since you are willing, at the same time, to exclude yourself from a character which every body else is inclined to give you.

I HAVE hitherto, replied Messalla, found no reason to change my opinion: and I am persuaded, that even you yourself, Aper, (whatever you may sometimes affect to the contrary) as well as my other two friends here, join with me in the same sentiments. I should, indeed, be glad if any of you would discuss this matter, and account for so remarkable a disparity; which I

## 58 OF ORATORY:

have often endeavoured in my own thoughts. And what to some appears a satisfactory solution of this phænomenon, to me, I confess, heightens the difficulty: for I find the very same difference prevails among the Grecian orators; and that the priest Nicetes, together with others of the Ephesian and Mitylenean schools, who humbly content themselves with raising the acclamations of their tasteless auditors; deviate much farther from *Æschines* or *Demosthenes*, than you, my friends, from *Tully* or *Asinius*.

The question you have started, said *Secundus*, is a very important

## A DIALOGUE. 59

one, and well worthy of consideration. But who so capable of doing justice to it as yourself? who, besides the advantages of a fine genius and great literature, have given, it seems, particular attention to this enquiry. I am very willing, answered Messalla, to lay before you my thoughts upon the subject, provided you will assist me with yours as I go along. I will engage for two of us, replied Martenus: Secundus and myself will speak to such points as you shall, I do not say omit, but think proper to leave to us. As for Aper, you just now informed us, it is usual with him to dissent from you in this article: and, indeed, I see he is al-

H

## 60 OF ORATORY:

ready preparing to oppose us, and will not look with indifference upon this our association in support of the antients.

UNDOUBTEDLY, returned Aper, I shall not tamely suffer the moderns to be condemned, unheard and undefended. But first let me ask, whom it is you call *antients*? What age of orators do you distinguish by that designation? The word always suggests to me a Nestor, or an Ulysses; men who lived above a thousand years since: whereas you seem to apply it to Demosthenes and Hyperides, who, it is agreed, flourished so late as the times of Philip and Alexander,

## A DIALOGUE. 61

and, indeed, survived them. It appears from hence, that there is not much above four hundred years distance between our age and that of Demosthenes : a portion of time, which, considered with respect to human duration, appears, I acknowledge, extremely long ; but, if compared with that immense æra which the philosophers talk of, is exceedingly contracted, and seems almost but of yesterday. For if it be true, what Cicero observes in his treatise inscribed to Hortensius, that the great and genuine year is that period in which the heavenly bodies return to the same position, wherein they were placed when they first began their respective or-

## 62 OF ORATORY:

bits; and this revolution contains 12,954 of our solar years; then Demosthenes, this antient Demosthenes of yours, lived in the same year, or rather I might say, in the same month with ourselves. But to mention the Roman orators: I presume, you will scarcely prefer Menenius Agrippa (who may with some propriety, indeed, be called an antient) to the men of eloquence among the moderns. It is Cicero, then, I suppose, together with Coelius, Cæsar, and Calvus, Brutus, Asinius, and Messalla, to whom you give this honourable precedency: yet I am at a loss to assign a reason, why these should be deemed antients rather than

## A DIALOGUE. 63

moderns. To instance in Cicero : he was killed, as his freedman Tiro informs us, on the 26th of December, in the consulship of Hirtius and Panfa, in which year Augustus and Pedius succeeded them in that dignity. Now, if we take fifty-six years for the reign of Augustus, and add twenty-three for that of Tiberius, about four for that of Caius, fourteen a-piece for Claudius and Nero, one for Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, together with the six that our present excellent \* prince has enjoyed the empire, we shall have

\* From this passage Fabricius asserts, that this dialogue was written in the 6th year of Vespasian's reign : but he evidently mistakes the time in which the scene of it is laid, for that in which it was composed. It is upon arguments

## 64 OF ORATORY:

about one hundred and twenty years from the death of Cicero to these times: a period, to which it is not impossible that a man's life may extend. I remember, when I was in Britain, to have met with an old soldier, who assured me, he had served in the army which opposed Cæsar's descent upon that island. If we suppose this person, by being taken prisoner, or by any other means, to have been brought to Rome, he might have heard Cæsar and Cicero, and likewise any of our contemporaries. I appeal to yourselves, whether at the

not better founded, that the critics have given Tacitus and Quinctilian the honour of this elegant performance.

*Vide Fabric. Bib. Lat. V. 1. 559.*

## A DIALOGUE. 65

last public donative, there were not several of the populace who acknowledged they had received the same bounty, more than once, from the hands of Augustus? It is evident, therefore, that these people might have been present at the pleadings both of Corvinus and Asinius: for Corvinus was alive in the middle of the reign of Augustus, and Asinius towards the latter end. Surely, then, you will not split a century, and call one orator an antient, and another a modern, when the very same person might be an auditor of both; and thus, as it were, render them contemporaries.

## 66 OF ORATORY:

THE conclusion I mean to draw from this observation is, that whatever advantages these orators might derive to their characters, from the period of time in which they flourished; the same will extend to us; and, indeed, with much more reason than to S. Galba, or to C. Carbonius. It cannot be denied, that the compositions of these last are very inelegant and unpolished performances; as I could wish, that not only your admired Calvus and Coelius, but, I will venture to add too, even Cicero himself (for I shall deliver my sentiments with great freedom) had not considered them as the proper mo-

## A DIALOGUE. 64<sup>7</sup>

dels of their imitation. Suffer me to premise, however, as I go along, that eloquence changes its qualities as it runs through different ages. Thus as Gracchus, for instance, is much more copious and florid than old Cato, so Crassus rises into a far higher strain of politeness and refinement than Gracchus. Thus likewise, as the speeches of Tully are more regular, and marked with superior elegance and sublimity, than those of the two orators last mentioned; so Corvinus is considerably more smooth and harmonious in his periods, as well as more correct in his language than Tully. I am not considering which of them is most eloquent. All I

## 68 OF ORATORY:

endeavour to prove at present is, that oratory does not manifest itself in one uniform figure, but is exhibited by the antients under a variety of different appearances. However, it is by no means a just way of reasoning, to infer that one thing must necessarily be worse than another, merely because it is not the same. Yet such is the unaccountable perversity of human nature, that whatever has antiquity to boast, is sure to be admired; as every thing novel is certainly disapproved. There are critics, I doubt not, to be found, who prefer even Appius Cæcus to Cato; as it is well known that Cicero had his censurers, who objected that

## A DIALOGUE. 69

his style was swelling and redundant, and by no means agreeable to the elegant conciseness of Attic eloquence. You have certainly read the letters of Calvus and Brutus to Cicero. It appears by those epistolary collections, that Cicero considered Calvus as a dry, unanimated orator, at the same time that he thought the style of Brutus negligent and unconnected. These, in their turn, had their objections, it seems, to Cicero: Calvus condemned his oratorical compositions, for being weak and enervated; as Brutus (to use his own expression) esteemed them *feeble* and *disjointed*. If I were to give my opinion, I should say,

70 OF ORATORY:

they each spoke truth of one another. But I shall examine these orators separately hereafter: my present design is only to consider them in a general view.

THE admirers of antiquity are agreed, I think, in extending the æra of the antients as far as Cassius Severus; whom they assert to have been the first that struck out from the plain and simple manner, which till then prevailed. Now, I affirm that he did so, not from any deficiency in point of genius or learning, but from his superior judgment and good sense. He saw it was necessary to accommodate oratory, as I observed before, to the diffe-

## A DIALOGUE. 71

rent times and taste of the audience. Our ancestors, indeed, might be contented (and it was a mark of their ignorance and want of politeness that they were so) with the immoderate and tedious length of speeches, which was in vogue in those ages ; as in truth, to be able to harangue for a whole day together was itself looked upon, at that illiterate period, as a talent worthy of the highest admiration. The immeasurable introduction, the circumstantial detail, the endless division and subdivision, the formal argument drawn out into a dull variety of logical deductions, together with a thousand other imperinencies of the same tasteless stamp,

## 72 OF ORATORY:

which you may find laid down among the precepts of those driefest of all writers, Hermagoras and Apollodorus, were then held in supreme honour. And, to complete all, if the orator had just dipped into philosophy, and could sprinkle his harangue with some of the most trite maxims of that science, they thundered out his applauses to the skies. For those were new and uncommon topics to them; as indeed very few of the orators themselves had the least acquaintance with the writings either of the philosophers or the rhetoricians. But in our more enlightened age, where even the lowest part of an audience have at least some general no-

## A DIALOGUE. 73

tion of literature, eloquence is constrained to find out new and more florid paths. She is obliged to avoid every thing that may fatigue or offend the ears of her audience; especially as she must now appear before judges, who decide not by law, but by authority; who prescribe what limits they think proper to the orator's speech; nor calmly wait till he is pleased to come to the point, but call upon him to return, and openly testify their impatience whenever he seems disposed to wander from the question. Who, I beseech you, would, in our days, endure an orator, who should open his harangue with a tedious apology for

## 74 OF ORATORY:

the weakness of his constitution? Yet almost every oration of Corvinus sets out in that manner. Would any man *now* have patience to hear out the five long books against Verres? or those endless volumes of pleadings in favour of Tully, or Cæcina? The vivacity of our modern judges even prevents the speaker; and they are apt to conceive some sort of prejudice against all he utters, unless he has the address to bribe their attention by the strength and spirit of his arguments, the liveliness of his sentiments, or the elegance and brilliancy of his descriptions. The very populace have some notion of the beauty of language, and

A DIALOGUE. 75

would no more relish the uncoothness of antiquity in a modern orator, than they would the gesture of old Roscius or Ambivius in a modern actor. Our young students too, who are forming themselves to eloquence, and for that purpose attend the courts of judicature, expect not merely to *hear*, but to carry home something worthy of remembrance: and it is usual with them, not only to canvass among themselves, but to transmit to their respective provinces, whatever ingenious thought or poetical ornament the orator has happily employed. For even the embellishments of poetry are now required; and those too, not copied from the

## 76 OF ORATORY:

heavy and antiquated manner of Attius or Pacuvius, but formed in the lively and elegant spirit of Horace, Virgil, and Lucan. Agreeably, therefore, to the superior taste and judgment of the present age, our orators appear with a more polished and graceful aspect. And most certainly it cannot be thought that their speeches are the less efficacious, because they soothe the ears of the audience with the pleasing modulation of harmonious periods. Has eloquence lost her power, because she has improved her charms? Are our temples less durable than those of old, because they are not formed of rude materials, but shine out in all the polish

A DIALOGUE. 77

and splendor of the most costly ornaments?

To confess the plain truth, the effect which many of the antients have upon me, is to dispose me either to laugh or sleep. Not to mention the more ordinary race of orators, such as Canutius, Arrius, or Fannius, with some others of the same dry and unaffecting cast; even Calvus himself scarce pleases me in more than one or two short orations: though he has left behind him, if I mistake not, no less than one and twenty volumes. And the world in general seems to join with me in the same opinion of them: for how few are the rea-

## 78 OF ORATORY:

ders of his invectives against Fulcinus, or Drusus? Whereas those against Vatinius are in every body's hands; particularly the second, which is indeed, both in sentiment and language, a well-written piece. It is evident therefore, that he had an idea of just composition, and rather wanted genius than inclination, to reach a more graceful and elevated manner. As to the orations of Cælius, though they are by no means valuable upon the whole, yet they have their merit, so far as they approach to the exalted elegance of the present times. Whenever, indeed, his composition is careless and unconnected, his expression low, and his sentiments

## A DIALOGUE. 79

gross ; it is then he is truly an ancient : and I will venture to affirm, there is no one so fond of antiquity as to admire him in that part of his character. We may allow Cæsar, on account of the great affairs in which he was engaged ; as we may Brutus, in consideration of his philosophy, to be less eloquent than might otherwise be expected of such superior geniuses. The truth is, even their warmest admirers acknowledge, that as orators they by no means shine with the same lustre, which distinguished every other part of their reputation. Cæsar's speech in favour of Decius, and that of Brutus in behalf of king Dejotarus, with some

80 OF ORATORY:

others of the same coldness and languor, have scarcely, I imagine, met with any readers; unless, perhaps, among such who can relish their verses. For verses, we know, they writ (and published too) I will not say with more spirit, but undoubtedly with more success, than Cicero; because they had the good fortune to fall in to much fewer hands. Asinius, one would guess, by his air and manner, to have been contemporary with Menenius, and Appius; though in fact he lived much nearer to our times. It is visible he was a close imitator of Attius and Pacuvius, not only in his tragedies, but also in his orations; so remarkably dry and un-

## A DIALOGUE. 81

polished are all his compositions ! But the beauty of eloquence, like that of the human form, consists in the smoothness, strength, and colour of its several parts. Corvinus I am inclined to spare ; though it was his own fault that he did not equal the elegant refinements of modern compositions ; as it must be acknowledged that his genius was abundantly sufficient for that purpose.

THE next I shall take notice of, is Cicero ; who had the same contest with those of his own times, as mine, my friends, with you. They, it seems, were favourers of the antients ; whilst he preferred

## 82 OF ORATORY:

the eloquence of his contemporaries: and in truth, he excels the orators of his own age in nothing more remarkably, than in the solidity of his judgment. He was the first who set a polish upon oratory; who seemed to have any notion of delicacy of expression, and the art of composition. Accordingly he attempted a more florid style; as he now and then breaks out into some lively flashes of wit; particularly in his later performances, when much practice and experience (those best and surest guides) had taught him a more improved manner. But his earlier compositions are not without the blemishes of antiquity. He is te-

## A DIALOGUE. 83

dious in his exordiums, too circumstantial in his narrations, and careless in retrenching luxuriations. He seems not easily affected, and is but rarely fired; as his periods are seldom either properly rounded, or happily pointed: he has nothing, in fine, you would wish to make your own. His speeches, like a rude edifice, have strength indeed and permanency; but are destitute of that elegance and splendor which are necessary to render them perfectly agreeable. The orator, however, in his compositions, as the man of wealth in his buildings, should consider ornament as well as use: his structure should be, not only substantial, but striking; and

## 84 OF ORATORY:

his furniture not merely convenient, but rich, and such as will bear a close and frequent inspection; whilst every thing that has a mean and aukward appearance ought to be totally banished. Let our orator then reject every expression that is obsolete, and grown rusty, as it were, by age: let him be careful not to weaken the force of his sentiments, by a heavy and inartificial combination of words, like our dull compilers of annals: let him avoid all low and insipid railery; in a word, let him vary the structure of his periods, nor end every sentence with the same uniform close.

## A DIALOGUE. 85

I WILL not expose the meanness of Cicero's conceits, nor his affectation of concluding almost every other period with, *as it should seem*, instead of pointing them with some lively and spirited turn. I mention even these with reluctance, and pass over many others of the same injudicious cast. It is singly, however, in little affectations of this kind, that they who are pleased to style themselves *antient orators* seem to admire and imitate him. I shall content myself with describing their characters, without mentioning their names: but you are sensible, there are certain pretenders to taste who prefer Lucilius

## 86 OF ORATORY:

to Horace, and Lucretius to Virgil; who hold the eloquence of your favourite Bassus or Nonianus in the utmost contempt, when compared with that of Sisenna or Varro; in a word, who despise the productions of our modern rhetoricians, yet are in raptures with those of Calvus. These curious orators prate in the courts of judicature after the *manner of the antients*, (as they call it) till they are deserted by the whole audience, and are scarce supportable even to their very clients. The truth of it is, that soundness of eloquence which they so much boast, is but an evidence of the natural weakness of their genius, as it is the effect alone of tame

## A DIALOGUE. 87

and cautious art. No physician would pronounce a man to enjoy a proper constitution, whose health proceeded entirely from a studied and abstemious regimen. To be only not indisposed, is but a small acquisition; it is spirits, vivacity, and vigour that I require: whatever comes short of this, is but one remove from imbecillity.

BE it then, (as with great ease it may, and in fact is) the glorious distinction of you, my illustrious friends, to ennoble our age with the most refined eloquence. It is with infinite satisfaction, Messalla, I observe, that you single out the most florid among the antients for your

## 88 OF ORATORY:

model. And you, my other two ingenious friends \*, so happily unite strength of sentiment with beauty of expression ; such a pregnancy of imagination, such a symmetry of ordonnance distinguish your speeches ; so copious or so concise is your elocution, as different occasions require ; such an inimitable gracefulness of style, and such an easy flow of wit adorn and dignify your compositions ; in a word, so absolutely you command the passions of your audience, and so happily temper your own, that however the envy and malignity of the present age may withhold that applause which is so justly your due ;

\* Maternus and Secundus.

A DIALOGUE. 89

posterity, you may rely upon it, will speak of you in the advantageous terms which you well deserve.

WHEN Aper had thus finished : It must be owned, said Maternus, our friend has spoken with much force and spirit. What a torrent of learning and eloquence has he poured forth in defence of the moderns ! and how completely vanquished the ancients with those very weapons which he borrowed from them ! However, (continued he, applying himself to Messalla) you must not recede from your engagement. Not that we expect you should enter into a defence of

90 OF ORATORY:

the antients, or suppose, (however Aper is pleased to compliment) that any of us can stand in competition with them. Aper himself does not sincerely think so, I dare say; but takes the opposite side in the debate, merely in imitation of the celebrated manner of antiquity. We do not desire you, therefore, to entertain us with a panegyric upon the antients: their well-established reputation places them far above the want of our encomiums. But what we request of you is, to account for our having so widely departed from that noble species of eloquence which they displayed: especially since we are not, according to Aper's calculati-

## A<sup>d</sup> DIALOGUE. 91

on, more than a hundred and twenty years distant from Cicero.

I SHALL endeavour, returned Messalla, to pursue the plan you have laid down to me. — I shall not enter into the question with Aper, (though indeed he is the first that ever made it one) whether those, who flourished above a century before us, can properly be styled antients. I am not disposed to contend about words: let them be called antients, or ancestors, or whatever other name he pleases, so it be allowed their oratory was superior to ours. I admit too, what he just now advanced, that there are various kinds of eloquence

M

## 92 OF ORATORY:

discernible in the same period; much more in different ages. But as among the Attic orators, Demosthenes is placed in the first rank, then Æschines, Hyperides next, and after him Lyfias and Lycurgus; an æra, which on all hands is agreed to have been the prime season of oratory: so amongst us, Cicero is by universal consent preferred to all his contemporaries; as after him Calvus, Asinius, Cæsar, Cælius, and Brutus, are justly acknowledged to have excelled all our preceding or subsequent orators. Nor is it of any importance to the present argument, that they differ in manner, since they agree in kind. The compositions of Calvus, it is con-

## A DIALOGUE. 93

fessed, are distinguished by their remarkable conciseness; as those of Asinius are by the harmonious flow of his language. Brilliancy of sentiment is Cæsar's characteristic; as poignancy of wit is that of Cælius. Solidity recommends the speeches of Brutus; while copiousness, strength, and vehemence, are the predominant qualities in Cicero. Each of them, however, displays an equal soundness of eloquence; and one may easily discover a general resemblance and kindred likeness run through their several works, though diversified, indeed, according to their respective geniuses. That they mutually detracted from each other,

94 OF ORATORY:

(as it must be owned there are some remaining traces of malignity in their letters) is not to be imputed to them as orators, but as men. No doubt Calvus, Afranius, and even Cicero himself, were liable to be infected with jealousy, as well as with other human frailties and imperfections. Brutus, however, I will singly except, from all imputations of malignity, as I am persuaded he spoke the sincere and impartial sentiments of his heart: for can it be supposed that HE should envy Cicero, who does not seem to have envied even Cæsar himself? As to Galba, Lælius, and some others of the antients, whom Aper has thought proper to condemn;

A DIALOGUE. 95

I am willing to admit that they have some defects, which must be ascribed to a growing and yet immature eloquence.

AFTER all; if we must relinquish the nobler kind of oratory, and adopt some lower species, I should certainly prefer the impetuosity of Gracchus, or the incorrectness of Crassus, to the studied foppery of Mæcenas, or the childish jingle of Gallio: so much rather would I see eloquence clothed in the most rude and negligent garb, than decked out with the wanton ornaments of paint and false finery! There is something in our present manner of elocution, which is so far

96 . OF ORATORY:

from being oratorical, that it is not even manly; and one would imagine our modern pleaders, by the levity of their wit, the affected smoothness of their periods, and licentiousness of their style, had a view to the stage in all their compositions. Accordingly some of them are not ashamed to boast (which one can scarce even mention without a blush) that their speeches are adapted to the soft modulation of stage-music. It is this depravity of taste which has given rise to the very indecent and preposterous, though very frequent expression, that such an orator speaks *smoothly*, and such a dancer moves *eloquently*. I am willing to

## A DIALOGUE. 97

admit therefore, that Cassius Severus (the single modern whom Aper has thought proper to name) when compared to these his degenerate successors, may justly be deemed an orator; though it is certain in the greater part of his compositions there appears far more strength than spirit. He was the first who neglected chastity of style, and propriety of method. Inexpert in the use of those very weapons with which he engages, he ever lays himself open to a thrust, by always endeavouring to attack; and one may much more properly say of him that he pushes at random, than that he comports himself according to the just rules of regular

98 OF ORATORY:

combat. Nevertheless, he is greatly superior, as I observed before, in the variety of his learning, the agreeableness of his wit, and the strength of his genius, to those who succeeded him: not one of whom, however, has Aper ventured to bring into the field. I imagined, that after having deposed Afinius, and Cœlius and Calvus, he would have substituted another set of orators in their place, and that he had numbers to produce in opposition to Cicero, to Cæsar, and the rest whom he rejected; or at least, one rival to each of them. On the contrary, he has distinctly and separately censured all the antients, while he

has  
den  
per  
tho  
sen  
dec  
ran  
nio  
dee  
Ap  
der  
for  
rica  
app  
and  
was

L  
Mat

## A DIALOGUE. 99

has ventured to commend the moderns in general only. He thought, perhaps, if he singled out some, he should draw upon himself the resentment of all the rest: for every declaimer among them modestly ranks himself, in his own fond opinion, before Cicero, though indeed after Gabinianus. But what Aper was not hardy enough to undertake, I will be bold to execute for him; and draw out his oratorical heroes in full view, that it may appear by what degrees the spirit and vigour of antient eloquence was impaired and broken.

LET me rather intreat you, (said Maternus interrupting him) to en-

N

## 100 OF ORATORY:

ter without any farther preface, upon the difficulty you first undertook to clear. That we are inferior to the antients in point of eloquence, I by no means want to have proved; being entirely of that opinion: but my present enquiry is how to account for our sinking so far below them? A question, it seems, you have examined, and which I am persuaded you would discuss with much calmness, if Aper's unmerciful attack upon your favourite orators had not a little discomposed you. I am nothing offended, returned Messalla, with the sentiments which Aper has advanced; neither ought you, my friends, remembering always

A DIALOGUE. 101

that it is an established law in debates of this kind, that every man may, with entire security, disclose his unreserved opinion. Proceed then, I beseech you, replied Martenus to the examination of this point concerning the antients, with a freedom equal to theirs: from which I suspect, alas! we have more widely degenerated than even from their eloquence.

THE cause, (said Messalla, resuming his discourse) does not lie very remote; and, though you are pleased to call upon me to assign it, is well known, I doubt not, both to you and to the rest of this company. For, is it not obvious

## 102 OF ORATORY:

that eloquence, together with the rest of the politer arts, has fallen from her antient glory, not for want of admirers, but through the dissoluteness of our youth, the negligence of parents, the ignorance of preceptors, and the universal disregard of antient manners? evils, which derived their source from Rome, and thence spread themselves through Italy, and over all the provinces; though the mischief, indeed, is most observable within our own walls. I shall take notice, therefore, of those vices to which the youth of this city are more peculiarly exposed; which rise upon them in number as they encrease in years. But before I enter far-

A DIALOGUE. 103

ther into this subject, let me premise an observation or two concerning the judicious method of discipline practised by our ancestors, in training up their children.

IN the first place then, the virtuous matrons of those wiser ages, did not abandon their infants to the mean hovels of mercenary nurses, but tenderly reared them up at their own breasts; esteeming the careful regulation of their children and domestic concerns, as the highest point of female merit. It was customary with them likewise to choose out some elderly female relation, of approved conduct, with whom the family in general entrusted

## 104 OF ORATORY:

ed the care of their respective children, during their infant years. This venerable person strictly regulated, not only their more serious pursuits, but even their very amusements; restraining them, by her respected presence, from saying or acting any thing contrary to decency and good-manners. In this manner, we are informed, Cornelia the mother of the two Gracchi, as also Aurelia and Attia, to whom Julius and Augustus Cæsar owed their respective births, undertook this office of family education, and trained up those several noble youths to whom they were related. This method of discipline was attended with one very singular advantage:

## A DIALOGUE. 105

the minds of young men were conducted sound and untainted to the study of the noble arts. Accordingly, whatever profession they determined upon, whether that of arms, eloquence, or law, they entirely devoted themselves to that single pursuit, and with undissipated application, possessed the whole compass of their chosen science.

BUT in the present age, the little boy is delegated to the care of some paultry Greek chamber-maid, in conjunction with two or three other servants, (and even those generally of the worst kind) who are absolutely unfit for every rational and serious office. From the idle

## 106 OF ORATORY:

tales and gross absurdities of these worthless people, the tender and uninstructed mind is suffered to receive its earliest impressions. It cannot, indeed, be supposed, that any caution should be observed among the domestics; since the parents themselves are so far from training their young families to virtue and modesty, that they set them the first examples of luxury and licentiousness. Thus our youth gradually acquire a confirmed habit of impudence, and a total disregard of that reverence they owe both to themselves and to others. To say truth, it seems as if a fondness for horses, actors and gladiators, the peculiar and distinguishing folly of

A DIALOGUE. 107

this our city, was imprest upon them even in the womb: and when once a passion of this contemptible sort has seized and engaged the mind, what opening is there left for the nobler arts?

ALL conversation in general is infected with topics of this kind; as they are the constant subjects of discourse, not only amongst our youth in their academies, but even of their tutors themselves. For it is not by establishing a strict discipline, or by giving proofs of their genius, that this order of men gain pupils; it is by the meanest compliances and most servile flattery. Not to mention how ill instructed

## 108 OF ORATORY:

our youth are in the very elements of literature, sufficient pains is by no means taken in bringing them acquainted with the best authors, or in giving them a proper notion of history, together with a knowledge of men and things. The whole that seems to be considered in their education, is, to find out a person for them called a Rhetorician. I shall take occasion immediately, to give you some account of the rise and progress of this profession in Rome, and shew you with what contempt it was received by our ancestors. But it will be necessary to lay before you a previous view of that scheme of discipline which the antient orators practised; of

A DIALOGUE. 109

whose amusing industry and unwearied application to every branch of the polite arts, we meet with many remarkable accounts in their own writings.

I NEED not inform you, that Cicero, in the latter end of his treatise entitled Brutus, (the former part of which is employed in commemorating the antient orators) gives a sketch of the several progressive steps by which he formed his eloquence. He there acquaints us, that he studied the civil law under Q. Mucius; that he was instructed in the several branches of philosophy by Philo the academic, and Diodorus the stoic;

## 110 OF ORATORY:

that not satisfied with attending the lectures of those eminent masters, of which there were at that time great numbers in Rome, he made a voyage into Greece and Asia, in order to enlarge his knowledge, and embrace the whole circle of sciences. Accordingly he appears by his writings, to have been master of logic, ethics, astronomy, and natural philosophy, besides being well versed in geometry, music, grammar, and, in short, in every one of the fine arts. For thus it is, my worthy friends; from deep learning and the united confluence of the arts and sciences, the resistless torrent of that amazing e-

## A DIALOGUE. III

eloquence derived its strength and rapidity.

THE faculties of the orator are not exercised, indeed, as in other sciences, within certain precise and determinate limits : on the contrary, eloquence is the most comprehensive of the whole circle of arts. Thus he alone can justly be deemed an orator, who knows how to employ the most persuasive arguments upon every question ; who can express himself suitably to the dignity of his subject, with all the powers of grace and harmony ; in a word, who can penetrate into every minute circumstance, and manage the whole train of incidents

## 112 OF ORATORY:

to the greatest advantage of his cause. Such, at least, was the high idea which the antients formed of this illustrious character. In order however to attain this eminent qualification, they did not think it necessary to declaim in the schools, and idly waste their breath upon feigned or frivolous controversies. It was their wiser method, to apply themselves to the study of such useful arts as concern life and manners, as treat of moral good and evil, of justice and injustice, of the decent and the unbecoming in actions. And, indeed, it is upon points of this nature that the business of the orator principally turns. For exam-

## A DIALOGUE. 113

ple, in the judiciary kind it relates to matters of equity ; as in the deliberative it is employed in determining the fit and the expedient : still however these two branches are not so absolutely distinct, but that they are frequently blended with each other. Now, it is impossible when questions of this kind fall under the consideration of an orator, to enlarge upon them in all the elegant and enlivening spirit of an efficacious eloquence, unless he is perfectly well acquainted with human nature ; unless he understands the power and extent of moral duties, and can distinguish those actions which do not partake either of vice or virtue.

## 114 OF ORATORY:

FROM the same source, likewise, he must derive his influence over the passions. For if he is skilful, for instance, in the nature of indignation, he will be so much the more capable of soothing or inflaming the breasts of his judges : if he knows wherein compassion consists, and by what workings of the heart it is moved, he will the more easily raise that tender affection of the soul. An orator trained up in this discipline, and practised in these arts, will have full command over the breasts of his audience, in whatever disposition it may be his chance to find them : and thus furnished with all the numberless powers of

## A DIALOGUE. 115

persuasion, will judiciously vary and accommodate his eloquence, as particular circumstances and conjunctures shall require. There are some, we find, who are most struck with that manner of elocution, where the arguments are drawn up in a short and close style: upon such an occasion the orator will experience the great advantage of being conversant in logic. Others, on the contrary, admire flowing and diffusive periods, where the illustrations are borrowed from the ordinary and familiar images of common observation: here the peripatetic writers will give him some assistance; as indeed they will, in general, supply him

## 116 OF ORATORY:

with many useful hints in all the different methods of popular address. The academics will inspire him with a becoming warmth: Plato with sublimity of sentiments, and Xenophon with an easy and elegant diction. Even the exclamatory manner of Epicurus, or Metrodorus, may be found, in some circumstances, not altogether unserviceable. In a word, what the stoics pretend to their wise man, ought to be verified in our orator; and he should actually possess all human knowledge. Accordingly the antients who applied themselves to eloquence, not only studied the civil laws, but also grammar, poetry, music, and geometry. Indeed,

the  
mig  
wh  
abf  
mar  
wit  
are  
  
I  
“ el  
“ qu  
“ ca  
“ w  
“ po  
place  
mark  
of ap  
it we  
prop

## A DIALOGUE. 117

there are few causes (perhaps I might justly say there are none) wherein a skill in the first is not absolutely necessary; as there are many in which an acquaintance with the last mentioned sciences are highly requisite.

If it should be objected, that  
“eloquence is the single science re-  
“quisite for the orator; as an oc-  
“casional recourse to the others  
“will be sufficient for all his pur-  
“poses:” I answer; in the first  
place, there will always be a re-  
markable difference in the manner  
of applying what we take up, as  
it were, upon loan, and what we  
properly possess; so that it will e-

## 118 OF ORATORY:

ver be manifest, whether the orator is indebted to others for what he produces, or derives it from his own unborrowed fund. And in the next, the sciences throw an inexpressible grace over our compositions, even where they are not immediately concerned; as their effects are discernible where we least expect to find them. This powerful charm is not only distinguished by the learned and the judicious, but strikes even the most common and popular class of auditors; insomuch that one may frequently hear them applauding a speaker of this improved kind, as a man of genuine erudition; as enriched with the whole treasures

A DIALOGUE. 119

of eloquence, and, in one word, acknowledge the complete orator. But I will take the liberty to affirm, that no man ever did, nor indeed ever can, maintain that exalted character, unless he enters the forum supported by the full strength of the united arts. Accomplishments, however, of this sort are now so totally neglected, that the pleadings of our orators are debased by the lowest expressions; as a general ignorance both of the laws of our country and the acts of the senate, is visible throughout their performances. All knowledge of the rights and customs of Rome is professedly ridiculed, and philosophy seems at present to be confi-

## 120 OF ORATORY:

dered as something that ought to be shunned and dreaded. Thus eloquence, like a dethroned potentate, is banished her rightful dominions, and confined to barren points and low conceit: and she who was once mistress of the whole circle of sciences, and charmed every beholder with the goodly appearance of her glorious train, is now stripped of all her attendants (I had almost said of all her genius) and seems as one of the meanest of the mechanic arts. This therefore I consider as the first, and the principal reason of our having so greatly declined from the spirit of the antients.

## A DIALOGUE. 121

IF I were called upon to support my opinion by authorities, might I not justly name, among the Grecians, Demosthenes? who, we are informed, constantly attended the lectures of Plato: as among our own countrymen, Cicero himself assures us, (and in these very words, if I rightly remember) that he owed whatever advances he had made in eloquence, not to the rhetoricians, but to the academic philosophers.

OTHER, and very considerable, reasons might be produced for the decay of eloquence. But I leave them, my friends, as it is proper I

## 122 OF ORATORY:

should, to be mentioned by you ; having performed my share in the examination of this question : and with a freedom, which will give, I imagine, as usual, much offence. I am sure, at least, if certain of our contemporaries were to be informed of what I have here maintained, I should be told, that in laying it down as a maxim, that a knowledge both of law and philosophy are essential qualifications in an orator, I have been fondly pursuing a phantom of my own imagination.

I AM so far from thinking, replied Maternus, you have completed the part you undertook,

that  
had  
sket  
mar  
ence  
wer  
in st  
indu  
igno  
still  
shew  
of th  
prove  
as th  
those  
be gl  
quain  
ercise  
those

## A DIALOGUE. 123

that I should rather imagine you had only given us the first general sketch of your design. You have marked out to us indeed, those sciences wherein the antient orators were instructed, and have placed in strong contraste their successful industry, with our unperforming ignorance. But something farther still remains: and as you have shewn us the superior acquirements of the orators in those more improved ages of eloquence, as well as the remarkable deficiency of those in our own times; I should be glad you would proceed to acquaint us with the particular exercises by which the youth of those earlier days were wont to

Q

124 OF ORATORY:

strengthen and improve their genius. For I dare say you will not deny, that oratory is acquired by practice far better than by precept. And our other two friends here, seem willing, I perceive, to admit it.

To which, when Aper and Secundus had signified their assent, Messalla, resuming his discourse, continued as follows :

HAVING then, as it should seem, disclosed to your satisfaction the seeds and first principles of antient eloquence, by specifying the several kinds of arts to which the antient orators were trained ; I shall

A DIALOGUE. 125

now lay before you the method they pursued, in order to gain a facility in the exertion of eloquence. This indeed I have in some measure anticipated, by mentioning the preparatory arts to which they applied themselves: for it is impossible to make any progress in a compass so various and so abstruse, unless we not only strengthen our knowledge by reflection, but improve a general aptitude by frequent exercise. Thus it appears that the same steps must be pursued in exerting our oratory, as in attaining it. But if this truth should not be universally admitted; if any should think, that eloquence may be possessed without paying

## 126 OF ORATORY:

previous court to her attendant sciences; most certainly, at least, it will not be denied, that a mind duly impregnated with the polite arts, will enter with so much the more advantage upon those exercises peculiar to the oratorical circus.

ACCORDINGLY, our ancestors when they designed a young man for the profession of eloquence, having previously taken due care of his domestic education, and seasoned his mind with useful knowledge, introduced him to the most eminent orator in Rome. From that time the youth commenced his constant follower, attending him up-

## A DIALOGUE. 127

on all occasions, whether he appeared in the public assemblies of the people, or in the courts of civil judicature. Thus he learned, if I may use the expression, the arts of oratorical conflict in the very field of battle. The advantages which flowed from this method were considerable: it animated the courage and quickened the judgment of youth, thus to receive their instructions in the eye of the world, and in the midst of affairs; where no man could advance an absurd or a weak argument without being rejected by the bench, exposed by his adversary, and, in a word, despised by the whole audience. By this method they im-

## 128 OF ORATORY:

bibed the pure and uncorrupted streams of genuine eloquence. But though they chiefly attached themselves to one particular orator, they heard likewise all the rest of their contemporary pleaders, in many of their respective debates. Hence also they had an opportunity of acquainting themselves with the various sentiments of the people, and of observing what pleased or disgusted them most in the several orators of the forum. By this means they were supplied with an instructor of the best and most improving kind, exhibiting, not the feigned semblance of eloquence, but her real and lively manifestation ; not a pretended, but a genuine ad-

A DIALOGUE. 129

versary, armed in earnest for the combat ; an audience ever full and ever new, composed of foes as well as friends, and where not a single expression could fall uncensured, or unapplauded. For you will agree with me, I am well persuaded, when I assert, that a solid and lasting reputation of eloquence must be acquired by the censure of our enemies, as well as by the applause of our friends ; or rather, indeed, it is from the former that it derives its surest and most unquestioned strength and firmness. Accordingly, a youth thus formed to the bar, a frequent and attentive hearer of the most illustrious orators and debates, instructed by the ex-

## 130 OF ORATORY:

perience of others, acquainted with the popular taste, and daily conversant in the laws of his country ; to whom the solemn presence of the judges, and the awful eyes of a full audience were familiar, rose at once into affairs, and was equal to every cause. Hence it was that Crassus at the age of nineteen, Cæsar at twenty-one, Pollio at twenty-two, and Calvus when he was but a few years older, pronounced those several speeches against Carbo, Dolabella, Cato, and Vatinius, which we read to this hour with admiration.

ON the other hand, our modern youth receive their education un-

der  
toric  
their  
little  
And  
appr  
appe  
unde  
Don  
of i  
it. —  
are f  
it is  
place  
thod  
infect  
prod  
For  
be o

## A DIALOGUE. 131

der certain declaimers called Rhetoricians: a set of men who made their first appearance in ROME, a little before the time of Cicero. And that they were by no means approved by our ancestors, plainly appears from their being enjoined, under the censorship of Crassus and Domitius, to shut up their schools of *impudence*, as Cicero expresses it. — But I was going to say, we are sent to certain academies, where it is hard to determine whether the place, the company, or the method of instruction is most likely to infect the minds of young people, and produce a wrong turn of thought. For nothing, certainly, can there be of an affecting solemnity in an

R

## 132 OF ORATORY:

audience, where all who compose it are of the same low degree of understanding; nor any advantage to be received from their fellow-students, where a parcel of boys and raw youths of unripe judgments harangue before each other, without the least fear or danger of criticism. And as for their exercises, they are ridiculous in their very nature. They consist of two kinds, and are either declamatory or controversial. The first, as being easier and requiring less skill, is assigned to the younger lads: the other is the task of more mature years. But, good gods! with what incredible absurdity are they composed! The truth is, the style of

th  
co  
uf  
ing  
po  
du  
on  
gin  
ma  
nie  
ftil  
fan  
are  
and  
“

\*  
ed in  
who  
the v  
put t

## A DIALOGUE. 133

their declamations is as false and contemptible, as the subjects are useless and fictitious. Thus, being taught to harangue in a most pompous diction, on the rewards due to tyrannicides, on the election to be made by deflowered virgins \*, on the licentiousness of married women, on the ceremonies to be observed in times of pestilence, with other topics of the same unconcerning kind, which are daily debated in the schools, and scarce ever at the bar; “ they “ appear absolute novices in the

\* It was one of the questions usually debated in these rhetoric-schools, whether the party who had been ravished should chuse to marry the violator of her chastity, or rather have him put to death.

134 OF ORATORY:

“ affairs of the world, and are by  
 “ much too elevated for common  
 “ life.”

“ † Here Messalla paused: when  
 “ Secundus, taking his turn in  
 “ the conversation, began with

† The latter part of Messalla's discourse, together with what immediately followed it in the original, is lost: the chasm, however, does not seem to be so great as some of the commentators suspect. The translator therefore has ventured to fill it up in his own way, with those lines which are distinguished by inverted commas. He has likewise given the next subsequent part of the conversation, to Secundus; though it does not appear in the original to whom it belongs. It would be of no great importance to the English reader, to justify our translator in this last article: though, perhaps, it would not be very difficult, if it were necessary.

To save the reader the trouble of turning to a second note upon a like occasion, it is proper to observe in this place, that he will find the

A DIALOGUE. 135

“ observing, that” the true and lofty spirit of genuine eloquence, like that of a clear and vigorous flame, is nourished by proper fuel, excited by agitation, and still brightens as it burns. It was in this manner, ‘ said he,’ that the oratory of our ancestors was kindled and spread itself. The’ moderns have as much merit of this kind, perhaps, as can be acquired under a settled and peaceable government : but far inferior, no doubt, to that which shone out in the times of licentiousness and confusion, when he was deemed the ablest orator, who

same inverted commas in page 151. The words included between them, are also an addition of the translator’s : and for the same reason as that just now mentioned.

## 136 OF ORATORY:

had most influence over a restless and ungoverned multitude. To this situation of public affairs was owing those continual debates concerning the Agrarian laws, and the popularity consequent thereupon; those long harangues of the magistrates, those impeachments of the great, those factions of the nobles, those hereditary enmities in particular families, and in fine, those incessant struggles between the senate and the commons; which, though each of them prejudicial to the state, yet most certainly contributed to produce and encourage that rich vein of eloquence which discovered itself in those tempestuous days. The way to dignities lay directly

## A DIALOGUE. 137

through the paths of eloquence. The more a man signalized himself by his abilities in this art, so much the more easily he opened his road to preferment, and maintained an ascendant over his colleagues, at the same time that it heightened his interest with the nobles, his authority with the senate, and his reputation with the people in general. The patronage of these admired orators was courted even by foreign nations; as the several magistrates of our own, endeavoured to recommend themselves to their favour and protection, by shewing them the highest marks of honour whenever they set out for the administration of their respective pro-

## 138 OF ORATORY:

vinces, and by studiously cultivating a friendship with them at their return. They were called upon, without any solicitation on their own part, to fill up the supreme dignities of the state. Nor were they even in a private station without great power, as by means of the persuasive arts they had a very considerable influence over both the senate and the people. The truth is, it was an established maxim in those days, that without the oratorical talents, no man could either acquire or maintain any high post in the government. And no wonder indeed, that such a notion should universally prevail: since it was impossible for any person

A DIALOGUE. 139

endued with this commanding art, to pass his life in obscurity, how much soever it might be agreeable to his own inclinations; since it was not sufficient merely to vote in the senate, without supporting that vote with good sense and eloquence; since in all public impeachments or civil causes, the accused was obliged to answer to the charge in his own person; since written depositions were not admitted in judicial matters, but the witnesses were called upon to deliver their evidence in open court. Thus our ancestors were eloquent, as much by necessity as by encouragements. To be possessed of the persuasive talents, was esteemed

## 140 OF ORATORY:

the highest glory; as the contrary character was held in the utmost contempt. In a word, they were incited to the pursuit of oratory, by a principle of honour as well as by a view of interest. They dreaded the disgrace of being considered rather as clients than patrons; of losing those dependants which their ancestors had transmitted to them, and seeing them mix in the train of others: in short, of being looked upon as men of mean abilities, and consequently either passed over in the disposal of high offices, or despised in the administration of them.

I KNOW not whether those an-

## A DIALOGUE. 141

tient historical pieces, which were lately collected and published by Mucianus from the old libraries where they have hitherto been preserved, have yet fallen into your hands. This collection consists of eleven volumes of the public journals, and three of epistles; by which it appears that Pompey and Crassus gained as much advantage from their eloquence as their arms: that Lucullus, Metellus, Lentulus, Curio, and the rest of those distinguished chiefs, devoted themselves with great application to this insinuating art: in a word, that not a single person in those times rose to any considerable degree of pow-

142 OF ORATORY:

er, without the assistance of the rhetorical talents.

To these considerations may be farther added, that the dignity and importance of the debates in which the ancients were engaged, contributed greatly to advance their eloquence. Most certain, indeed, it is, that an orator must necessarily find great difference with respect to his powers, when he is to harangue only upon some trifling robbery, or a little paultry form of pleading; and when the faculties of his mind are warmed and enlivened by such interesting and animating topics as bribery at elections, as the oppression of our allies,

A DIALOGUE. 143

or the massacre of our fellow-citizens. Evils these, which, beyond all peradventure, it were better should never happen; and we have reason to rejoice that we live under a government where we are strangers to such terrible calamities: still it must be acknowledged, that wherever they did happen, they were wonderful incentives to eloquence. For the orator's genius rises and expands itself in proportion to the dignity of the occasion upon which it is exerted; and I will lay it down as a maxim, that it is impossible to shine out in all the powerful lustre of genuine eloquence, without being inflamed by a suitable importance of subject.

144 OF ORATORY:

Thus the speech of Demosthenes against his guardians, scarcely, I imagine, established his character; as it was not the defence of Archias, or Quinctius, that acquired Cicero the reputation of a consummate orator. It was Catiline, and Milo, and Verres, and Mark Antony, that warmed him with that noble glow of eloquence, which gave the finishing brightness to his unequalled fame. Far I am from insinuating, that such infamous characters deserve to be tolerated in a state, in order to supply convenient matter of oratory: all I contend for is, that this art flourishes to most advantage in turbulent times. Peace, no doubt, is infi-

A DIALOGUE. 145

nitely preferable to war ; but it is the latter only that forms the soldier. It is just the same with eloquence : the oftener she enters, if I may so say, the field of battle ; the more wounds she gives and receives ; the more powerful the adversary with which she contends ; so much the more ennobled she appears in the eye of mankind. For it is the disposition of human nature, always to admire what we see is attended with danger and difficulty in others, how much soever we may choose ease and security for ourselves.

ANOTHER advantage which the antient orators had over the mo-

## 146 OF ORATORY:

derms, is, that they were not confined in their pleadings, as we are, to a few hours. On the contrary, they were at liberty to adjourn as often as they thought proper; they were unlimited as to the number of days or of counsel, and every orator might extend his speech to the length most agreeable to himself. Pompey, in his third consulship, was the first who curbed the spirit of eloquence: still however permitting all causes to be heard, agreeably to the laws, in the forum and before the prætors. How much more considerable the business of those magistrates was, than that of the centumvirs, who at present determine all causes, is evident from

A DIALOGUE. 147

this circumstance, that not a single oration of Cicero, Cæsar, or Brutus, or in short of any one celebrated orator, was spoken before these last, excepting only those of Pollio in favour of the heirs of Urbinia. But then it must be remembered, that these were delivered about the middle of the reign of Augustus, when a long and uninterrupted peace abroad, a perfect tranquillity at home, together with the general good conduct of that wise prince, had damped the flames of eloquence as well as those of sedition.

You will smile, perhaps, at what I am going to say, and I men-

T

## 148 OF ORATORY:

tion it for that purpose: but is there not something in the present confined garb of our orators, that has an ill effect even upon their elocution, and makes it appear low and contemptible? May we not suppose likewise, that much of the spirit of oratory is sunk, by that close and despicable scene wherein many of our causes are now debated? For the orator, like a generous steed, requires a free and open space wherein to expatiate; otherwise the force of his powers is broken, and half the energy of his talents is checked in their career. There is another circumstance also exceedingly prejudicial to the interest of eloquence, as it prevents a due at-

## A DIALOGUE. 149

tention to style : we are now obliged to enter upon our speech whenever the judge calls upon us ; not to mention the frequent interruptions which arise by the examination of witnesses. Besides, the courts of judicature are at present so unfrequented, that the orator seems to stand alone, and talk to bare walls. But eloquence rejoices in the clamour of loud applause, and exults in a full audience, such as used to press round the ancient orators when the forum stood thronged with nobles ; when a numerous retinue of clients, when foreign ambassadors, and whole cities assisted at the debate ; and when even Rome herself was con-

## 150 OF ORATORY:

cerned in the event. The very appearance of that prodigious concourse of people, which attended the trials of Bestia, Cornelius, Scaurus, Milo, and Vatinius, must have enflamed the breast of the coldest orator. Accordingly we find, that of all the antient orations now extant, there are none which have more eminently distinguished their authors, than those which were pronounced under such favourable circumstances. To these advantages we may farther add likewise, the frequent general assemblies of the people, the privilege of arraigning the most considerable personages, and the popularity of such impeachments; when the sons of oratory spared not

A DIALOGUE. 151

even Scipio, Sylla, or Pompey; and when, in consequence of such acceptable attacks upon suspected power, they were sure of being heard by the people with the utmost attention and regard. How must these united causes contribute to raise the genius, and inspire the eloquence of the antients!

“ MATERNUS, who, you will  
“ remember, was in the midst of  
“ his harangue in favour of poetry  
“ when Messalla first entered into  
“ the room, finding Secundus was  
“ now silent, took that opportunity  
“ of resuming his invective  
“ against the exercise of the oratorical  
“ arts in general.” That species of eloquence, said he,

152 OF ORATORY:

wherein poetry is concerned, is calm and peaceable, moderate and virtuous: whereas that other supreme kind, which my two friends here have been describing, is the offspring of licentiousness (by fools miscalled liberty) and the companion of sedition; bold, obstinate and haughty, unknowing how to yield or how to obey, an encourager of a lawless populace, and a stranger in all well-regulated communities. Who ever heard of an orator in Lacedæmon or Crete? cities which exercised the severest discipline, and were governed by the strictest laws. We have no account of Persian or Macedonian eloquence, or indeed of that of any other state which

## A DIALOGUE. 153

submitted to a regular administration of government. Whereas Rhodes and Athens (places of popular rule, where all things lay open to all men) swarmed with orators innumerable. In the same manner, Rome, while she was under no settled policy; while she was torn with parties, dissensions, and factions; while there was no peace in the forum, no harmony in the senate, no moderation in the judges; while there was neither reverence paid to superiors, nor bounds prescribed to magistrates — Rome, under these circumstances, produced, beyond all dispute, a stronger and brighter vein of eloquence; as some valuable

154 OF ORATORY:

plants will flourish even in the wildest soil. But the tongue of the Gracchi did nothing compensate the republic for their seditious laws; nor the superior eloquence of Cicero make him any amends for his sad catastrophe.

THE truth is, the forum (that single remain which now survives of antient oratory) is, even in its present situation, an evident proof that all things amongst us are not conducted in that well-ordered manner one could wish. For, tell me, is it not the guilty or the miserable alone, that fly to us for assistance? When any community implores our protection, is it not be-

A DIALOGUE. 155

cause it either is insulted by some neighbouring state, or torn by domestic feuds? And what province ever seeks our patronage, 'till she has been plundered or oppressed? But far better it surely is, never to have been injured, than at last to be redressed. If there was a government in the world free from commotions and disturbances, the profession of oratory would there be as useless, as that of medicine to the sound: and as the physician would have little practice or profit among the healthy and the strong, so neither would the orator have much business or honour where obedience and good manners universally prevail. To what

## 156 OF ORATORY:

purpose are studied speeches in a senate, where the better and the major part of the assembly are already of one mind? What the expediency of haranguing the populace, where public affairs are not determined by the voice of an ignorant and giddy multitude, but by the steady wisdom of a single person? To what end voluntary informations, where crimes are unfrequent and inconsiderable? or of laboured and invidious defences, where the clemency of the judge is ever on the side of the accused? Believe me then, my worthy (and, as far as the circumstances of the age require, my eloquent) friends, had the gods reversed the date of

A DIALOGUE. 157

your existence, and placed *you* in the times of those antients we so much admire, and *them* in yours ; *you* would not have fallen short of that glorious spirit which distinguished their oratory, nor would *they* have been destitute of a proper temperature and moderation. But since a high reputation for eloquence is not consistent with great repose in the public ; let every age enjoy its own peculiar advantages, without derogating from those of a former.

MATERNUS having ended ; Messalla observed, that there were some points which his friend had laid down, that were not perfect-

158 OF ORATORY.

ly agreeable to his sentiments; as there were others, which he wished to hear explained more at large: but the time is now, said he, too far advanced. If I have maintained any thing, replied Maternus, which requires to be opened more explicitly, I shall be ready to clear it up in some future conference: at the same time rising from his seat and embracing Aper; Messalla and I (continued he smiling) shall arraign you, be well assured, before the poets and the admirers of the antients. And I both of you (returned Aper) before the rhetoricians. Thus we parted in mutual good humour.

FINIS.



